

U.S.
Home Missions

Our Texas-Mexican Work

Foreign Missions
at Home



The Executive Committee of Home Missions
of the Presbyterian Church in
the United States

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OUR TEXAS-MEXICAN WORK.

A distance of less than a mile measures the difference between our Foreign and our Home missionary labors for the evangelization of our Mexican neighbors. The fields touch for seven hundred miles of border country between Mexico and Texas; and there is no essential difference between the needs of the Mexicans residing on either side of the line. Racial characteristics and Romanism produce similar results wherever found, and the same sort of help is needed in every case.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

They are said to be "the descendants of the best civilization of ancient America and of the earliest civilization of modern America." The Mexicans are an interesting race, needing only to be known to be admired for many noble qualities. Possessing an amiable and courteous disposition they have been characterized as "ignorant as slaves, more courteous than kings, poor as Lazarus and more hospitable than Croesus." A study of their national history and their prolonged struggle for liberty reveals them as a people of heroic blood.

In religion they are Roman Catholics. Originally they were pagans. After the coming of the Spaniards, they were compelled to become Catholics; but the darkness of heathenism has never been lifted nor the superstitions of paganism removed. For more than three hundred and fifty years

the priests had absolute sway over them, "and yet when Protestant missionaries entered, it was to find a people living in darkness, degradation and sin." The Cross, the saints, the Virgin Mary are idolatrously worshipped, but they know not Christ in the forgiveness of their sins.

ALL MEXICANS NOT ROMAN CATHOLICS.

Though they have been under Papal dominion for more than three hundred years, it is not true to say that all Mexicans are Catholics. Of those who have entered the United States, it is said that a large per cent. of the men, if not a majority, are "free thinkers," and are among the bitterest enemies of Rome; while many of the women, also, have broken from the traditional faith and lapsed into the darkness and hopelessness of infidelity.

THE NUMBER IN TEXAS.

There are over 400,000 Mexicans in this state, and every year adds to this number. Within a margin of sixty miles on the Texas side of the Rio Grande there are probably one hundred Mexicans for every American. Leaving out the larger towns, the proportion perhaps would be still greater. Fifteen Spanish newspapers are published in the state, and there are towns where the English language rarely is spoken.

In these sections the Roman Catholic religion, the Spanish language, and Mexican

customs predominate. In the city of Laredo, for example, half the streets are named for Mexican heroes, while the avenues (cross streets) are named in honor of Catholic saints. The spiritual and moral condition of the Texas Mexicans is not less appalling than that which obtains in Mexico. Ysleta, perhaps the oldest town in the state, about eleven miles down the Rio Grande from El Paso, is almost exclusively Mexican. The Catholic church here is over 300 years old, but there is no Protestant Mission of any denomination.

ORIGIN OF OUR WORK.

The beginning of our Texas-Mexican Mission was clearly the Lord's doing, and it has been characterized from its inception by the raising up of especially prepared laborers as the exigencies of the work demanded. A Mexican Christian, Jose Maria Botello, who had been converted by reading a tract, received and made an elder in the Brownsville Mexican Presbyterian Church by Dr. A. T. Graybill, was in 1883 providentially led to San Marcos, in the interior of the state. In 1884 ten Mexicans, converted through the efforts of Sr. Botello, were baptized and received into the San Marcos church by Rev. W. C. C. Kelly.

On the same day that our first Mexican Presbyterian Church was organized by Western Texas Presbytery, Rev. Walter S. Scott was taken under the care of that Presbytery as a candidate for the ministry. Born of Scotch parents on Mexican soil, and

acquainted with Spanish from his infancy, he acted as interpreter for the Presbytery in the organization of this church. Mr. Scott in April 1892, was ordained by his Presbytery its first regular evangelist to the Mexicans in Texas. He has since then given his entire time to his chosen work, and for several years he was the only Presbyterian evangelist to the Mexicans.

Again God sent to this Mission a timely gift in the person of Dr. H. B. Pratt, formerly missionary of our Church at Barranquilla, South America, who has recently given to the Spanish-speaking people what is acknowledged as the best translation of the Bible in that language. Thoroughly familiar with Spanish, an unexcelled Bible scholar, Dr. Pratt laid firm the foundation of our Mexican work in Texas by training several promising young men for the ministry among their own people, two of whom are still laboring on our side of the Rio Grande, Rev. Reynaldo Avila and Rev. Elias Trevino.

In June 1899, Rev. and Mrs. R. D. Campbell were added to our missionary force, and have been greatly blessed in their labors. Mrs. Campbell, who as Miss Minnie Gunn, was formerly with our Mission in Old Mexico, has been especially successful in promoting increased and wider interest in the work among the Mexicans in Texas.

It also seems a part of God's providence in giving to the Mexican work at El Paso in 1907, Rev. and Mrs. C. R. Womeldorf, for-

merly of our Brazil Mission. El Paso (the Pass) is the gateway between Texas and Mexico, and through this portal about 30,000 Mexicans each year enter the United States. It is a rapidly growing city, the population of which, now about 50,000, has far more than doubled in the past ten years. Of the permanent Mexican residents in El Paso, perhaps 40,000, only about 400 are Protestants. These incoming aliens become Americanized before they are evangelized—result, indifference. Here we have a Texas-Mexican Church with 60 members, a flourishing Sunday School and a Christian Endeavor Society.

More than 100 have been received into the Church upon profession of their faith since the mission was opened. A modest, but comfortable church building has been provided which gives visibility and permanency to the organization and great encouragement to the workers.

The Home and Foreign Mission Committees unite in the support of Mr. and Mrs. Womeldorf, affording another illustration of the oneness of the endeavor to proclaim liberty to these Gospel needing people, on whichever side of the Rio Grande they happen to live.

INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE.

To meet the need of a practical training for the Mexican youth, the Texas-Mexican Industrial School was opened at Kingsville in 1912 with fifty students in attendance.

The Institute owns 669 acres of land which is rapidly being cleared and prepared for cultivation.

The Institute is badly handicapped by a lack of money, both for support and for its better equipment. A dormitory is imperatively needed for the accommodation of those who desire the Christian training that this school offers.

OUR SUCCESS.

Our Texas-Mexican Mission is not only the largest work of our Church among our alien population, but it is the most successful of any denomination laboring among the Mexicans in the United States. Beginning in 1892 with one small church of fifty-nine members, it has grown into the Texas-Mexican Presbytery with at present twenty-one organized churches and more than 1,000 members. In addition to this, several hundred Mexicans have been won to Christ by our workers, but have moved from the bounds of the Presbytery. Many converted in our churches have returned to their own country carrying the gospel to their own people, and are thus contributing to the evangelization of Mexico. The beginning of our Mission at Linares, Mexico, was largely due to a convert from Texas.

THE MEXICAN CHRISTIANS.

But this is not all. The spiritual results are a much more important factor in determining the success of any work. Our Mexican converts are faithful to the church and

to its services. Nearly every congregation has its own house of worship, the people themselves doing the greater part of the work of building. Most of the congregations have Sabbath Schools, several have a Young People's Society and a Woman's Missionary Society. Services are held every Sabbath, and in the absence of the pastor are invariably conducted by an elder. They regularly have family worship in their homes, and we have not a Mexican elder who cannot pray in public. The camp meetings held annually are well attended and wield a large influence in the evangelization of the Mexicans within our borders.

Surely a work producing such results is worth while. What we have done is only a beginning. Will the Church heed the pleadings of its devoted missionaries, who beg not for themselves but for the people to whose redemption they have consecrated their lives, and give the churches, schools, and more adequate support so greatly needed for the extension of the work. The constant call is for more workers to carry the gospel to those who have never heard it, and churches could now be organized at many places, if there were some one to minister to them. Thousands upon thousands of these sin-burdened people are without God and without hope in the world. They need to know Christ, not as a vague superstition, but as the Savior from sin. Shall we not give to them the good news of salvation?